

# Empowering women in the EU and beyond: Labour market

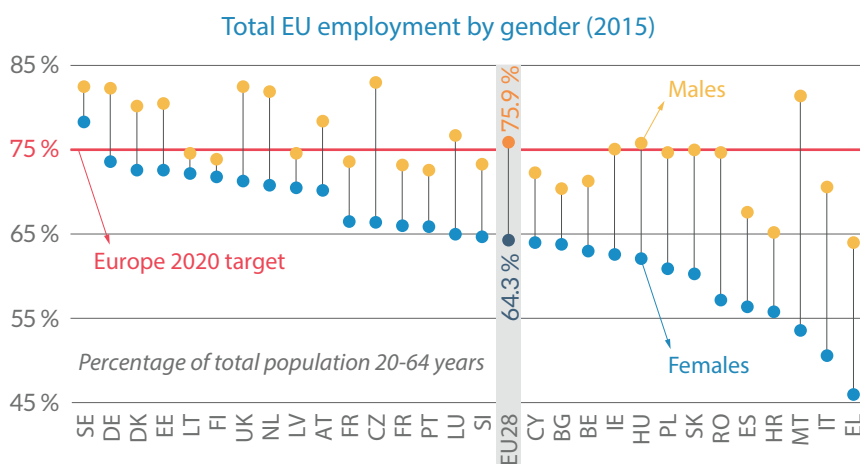
Equal access to the labour market is recognised as a cornerstone of women's [economic independence](#) and participation in public life. The EU and its Member States have obligations to integrate those excluded from the labour market (Article 151 TFEU), [advance](#) gender equality in employment (Article 153 TFEU; [Directive 2006/54/EC](#)), and ensure equal pay for work of equal value (Article 157 TFEU). All EU Member States have ratified the 1979 UN Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women, which upholds women's rights to work, equal opportunities and social benefits ([Article 11](#)).

Over the past two decades, there has been a continuous upward [trend](#) in women's employment rate, showing that women now make up an increasing proportion of the total workforce across the EU. Despite the economic crisis, the gender gap in labour market participation is narrowing, although [analysis](#) suggests that this is not so much because women's situation has improved as because men's has become comparatively worse. Concerning the EU [target](#) of raising the employment rate of 20-64 year-olds to at least 75 % for both women and men by 2020, there are significant variations between Member States. Despite women's rising [educational attainment](#), men's employment rate remains higher across the EU-28. The [transition](#) from school to work is a defining moment, with women overrepresented amongst youth not in training or employment ('NEETs'). [Parenthood](#) also marks a significant change in many women's career life, ranging from total withdrawal to a shift into '[non-standard](#)' employment (such as part-time work).

EU-28 (20 - 64 years, 2015)	Females	Males	Total
Population	152	150	302
Active persons	108	125	233
Employed persons	98	114	212
Unemployed persons	10	11	21
Inactive persons	44	25	69

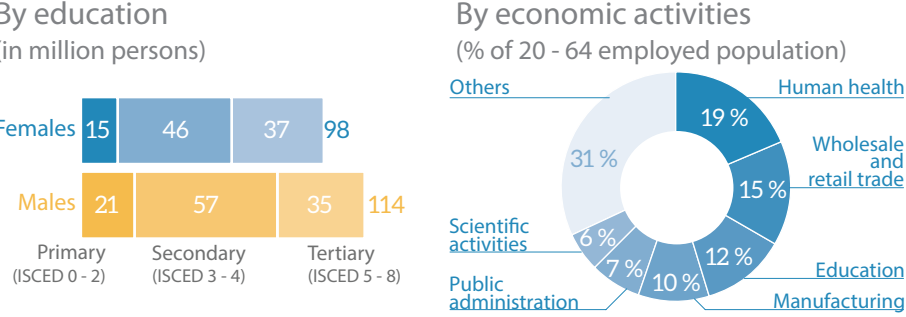
Million persons

This gendered pattern of career interruptions or non-standard employment may be voluntarily chosen, but it can also reflect the specific barriers women face in balancing paid work and unpaid care and household labour, for which they remain disproportionately responsible. Discontinuous employment, together with [gender segregation](#) of the labour market, contributes to women's lower earnings and the persistence of a [gender pay gap](#), with implications into [old age](#). Social policies, including paid parental leave for [men](#) and women, provision of accessible, high quality childcare and work-life balance measures, can have a positive [influence](#) on women's prospects and experience of work.

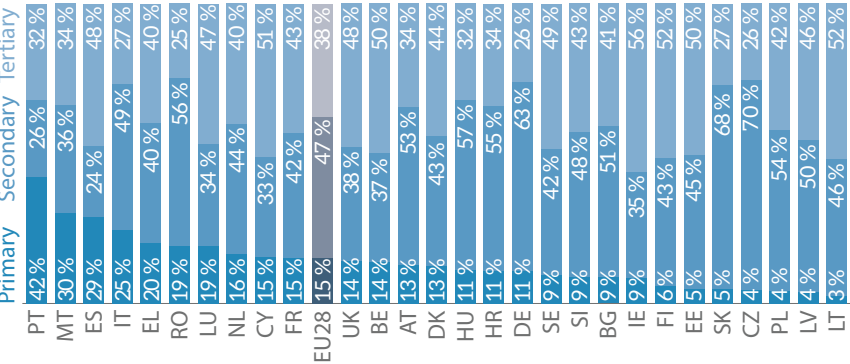


This briefing is part of a series 'Empowering women in the EU and beyond'. The others cover [education and reproductive health](#), [leadership and conflict resolution](#) and [economic and financial power](#).

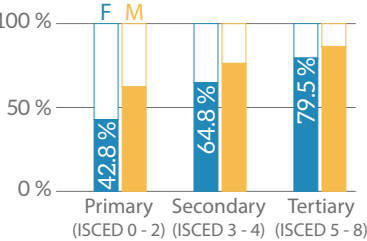
Employed women (20 - 64)



By education (% of 20 - 64 employed population)

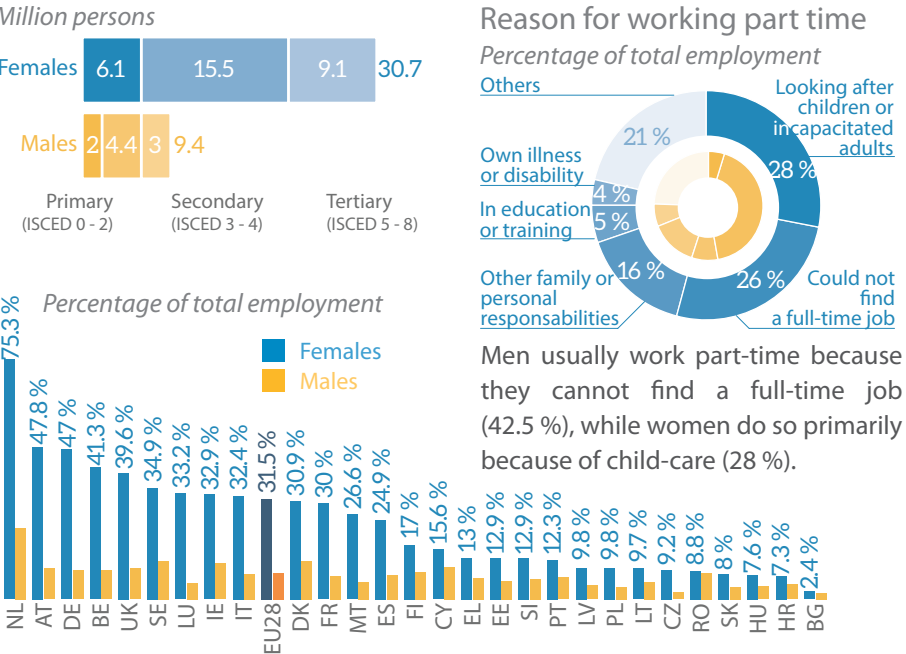


Employment rate (% of 20 - 64 population)



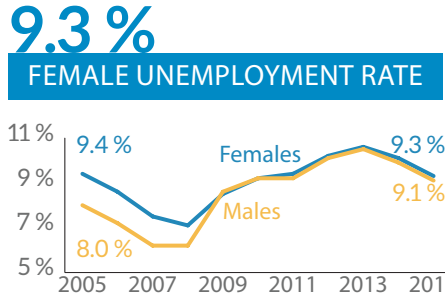
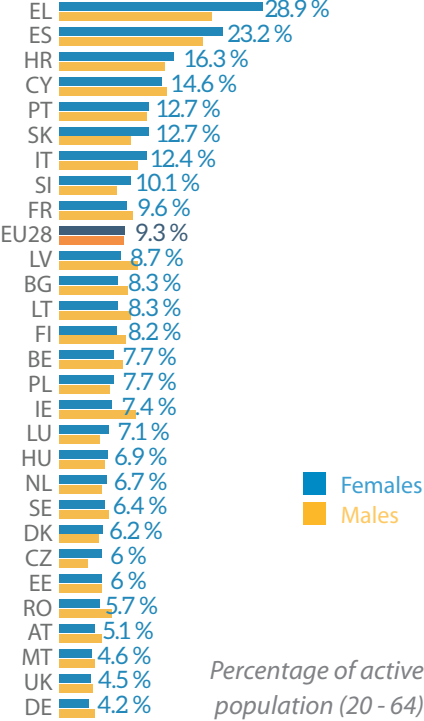
There are 98 million employed women aged 20-64 in the EU, of which 15 % (approximately 15 million) have primary education. Portugal has the highest number of employed women with primary education (42 %), and Lithuania the lowest (3 %). The EU has a 42.8 % employment rate for 20-64 year-old women with primary education (that is, four out of ten women in the EU). Some 19 % of the women who are in employment work in the healthcare sector.

Women in part time employment (20 - 64)

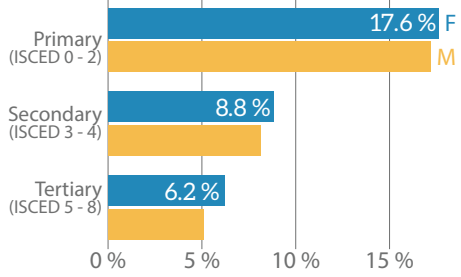


Men usually work part-time because they cannot find a full-time job (42.5 %), while women do so primarily because of child-care (28 %).

Female unemployment rate (20 - 64)

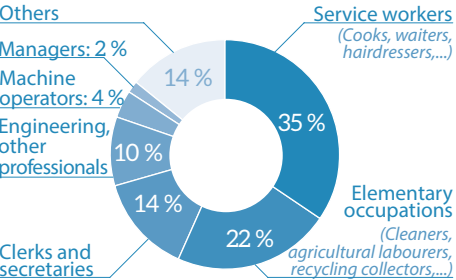


By education (% of active population 20 - 64)

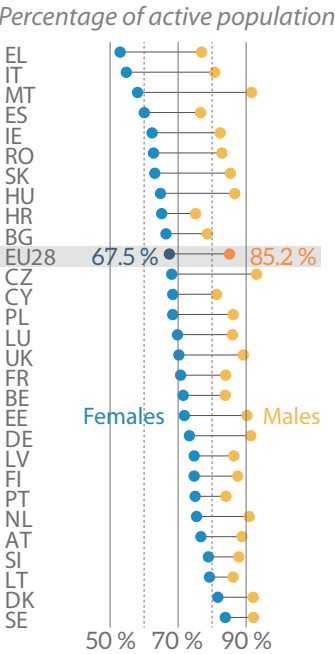


As a whole, nine out of 100 EU women (9.3 %) are unemployed, with this figure ranging from 28.9 % (EL) to 4.2 % (DE) among Member States. The difference in the unemployment rate between men and women has decreased from 1.4 percentage points in 2005 to 0.2 percentage points in 2015. The female unemployment rate is the highest among women with primary education (17.6 %); service workers are the majority among the 10 million unemployed women.

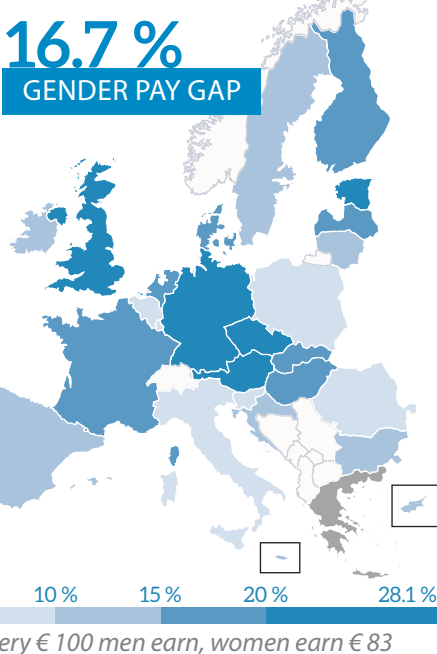
Previous occupation (% of 20 - 64 unemployed population)



Women with children (15 - 64)

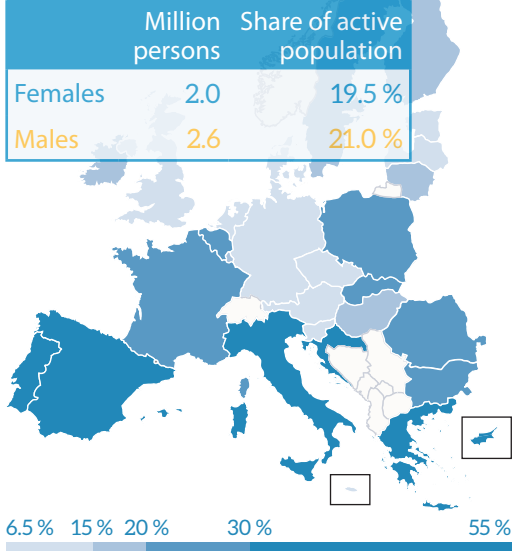


Gender pay gap



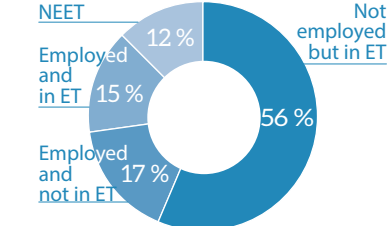
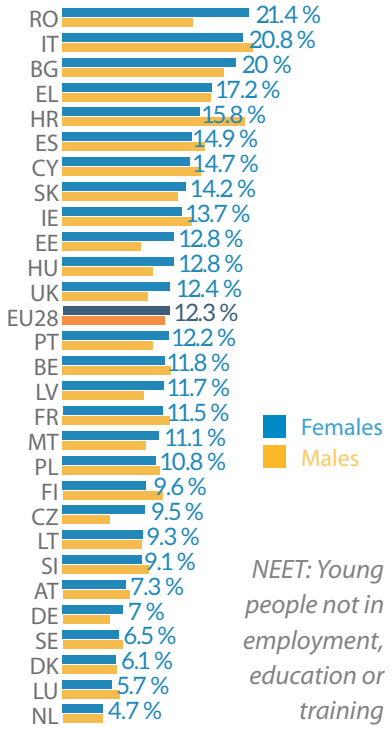
Data in this paper refers to EU28 and year 2015, unless otherwise stated.

Youth unemployment (% of active population 15 - 24)

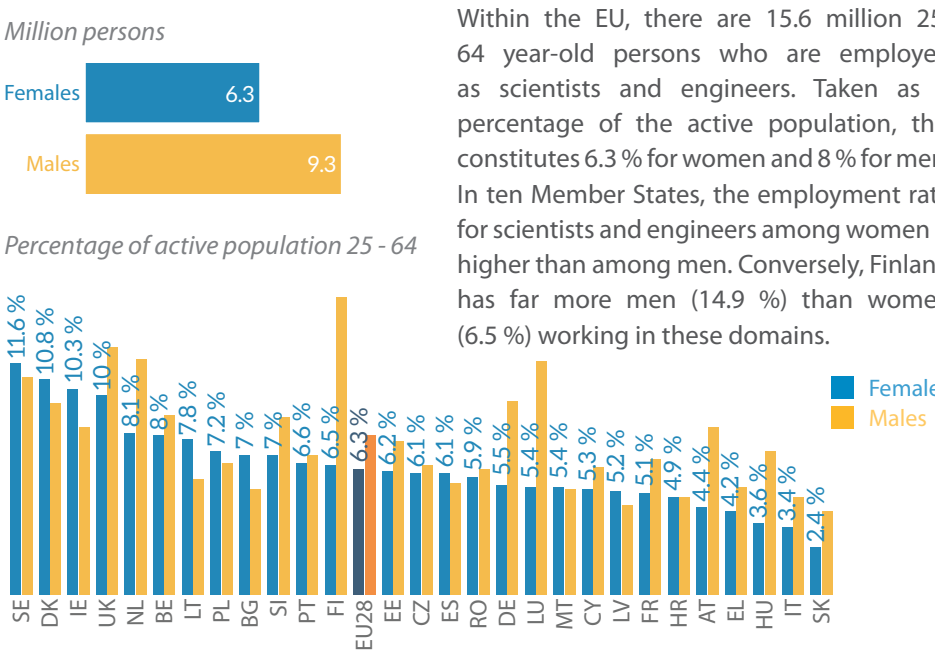


Some 2 million young EU women (aged 15-24) are unemployed. This is 19.5 % of the EU's active population, with differences between Member States ranging from 6.5 % to 55 %. Overall, there are 12.3 % female NEETs among the EU population aged 15-24 years; this figure ranges from 21.4 % to 4.7 % among the Member States. Even though at EU level the percentage of female NEETs is slightly higher than that for male ones, this is not the case in all Member States: in Romania, there are far more female NEETs (a 6.4 percentage points difference), while in Croatia it is the opposite (5.2 percentage points more men than women).

NEET (% of total population 15 - 24)



Women aged 25-64, employed as scientists and engineers



Within the EU, there are 15.6 million 25-64 year-old persons who are employed as scientists and engineers. Taken as a percentage of the active population, this constitutes 6.3% for women and 8% for men. In ten Member States, the employment rate for scientists and engineers among women is higher than among men. Conversely, Finland has far more men (14.9 %) than women (6.5 %) working in these domains.

## Long-term trends in the EU

Social and cultural [attitudes](#) towards the involvement of women – particularly mothers – in paid employment, and towards men's participation in childcare and domestic work, vary across the EU and are likely to be a factor in determining national-level policy. In addition, the gender implications of emerging employment trends will need careful consideration in the coming years. One such implication has to do with non-standard employment – a phenomenon that is expected to grow as production methods become increasingly flexible – examples of which are [on-call work](#) (including 'zero-hours contracts'), [temporary agency work](#) and work in the 'on-demand' or 'gig' economy. Currently, compared to other population groups, [women](#), young people and migrants are more likely to be working under non-standard arrangements. Although such arrangements allow more workers to integrate into or return to the labour market, they also pose challenges due to insecurity, economic instability and lower entitlements, including maternity benefits. Another challenge will be to ensure that EU women are able to take full advantage of higher paid and higher quality jobs in [expanding](#) sectors such as science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM), by encouraging their training and recruitment and preventing them from [dropping out](#) over their careers.

## Global outlook

In September 2015, during one of its historic summits in New York, the **United Nations** adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development ([Resolution A/RES/70/1](#)). The 2030 Agenda is binding for all UN member states; its [SDG No 8](#) aims to promote inclusive economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all. According to the UN Secretary-General's report [Progress towards the SDGs](#), unemployment affects the world's population differently according to gender and age. Women and youth (aged 15 to 24) are more likely to be unemployed than men and adults aged 25 and above. Moreover, women and girls are more likely to engage in unpaid work, such as care giving, cooking and cleaning. On average, women report spending 19 % of their daily time on unpaid activities, while men report spending no more than 8 %. Women's engagement in unpaid and domestic work, combined with their paid work, implies higher work burdens and sacrifices in terms of time for self-care, learning and studying.

## European Parliament position

On 13 March 2017, the European Parliament will be debating a motion for a resolution on equality between women and men in the European Union in 2014-2015, based on an own-initiative [report](#) from its Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality (FEMM). The report calls for EU and national action and investment to support women's employment in good quality jobs, including urgent steps to ensure equal pay and measures to help working parents. Parliament adopted specific resolutions on [work-life balance](#) and the [gender gap in ICT and STEM](#) in 2016, and on the [gender pay gap](#) in 2015.

**Eurostat definitions:** *Employed persons* are persons aged 20-64 who performed work, even for just one hour per week, for pay, profit or family gain or were not at work but had a job or business from which they were temporarily absent. *Unemployed persons* are persons aged 20-64 who were without work during the reference week, were currently available for work and were either actively seeking work in the past four weeks or had already found a job to start within the next three months. *Inactive persons* are neither employed nor unemployed and they are not available or looking for work either. The *gender pay gap* represents the difference between average gross hourly earnings of male paid employees and of female paid employees as a percentage of average gross hourly earnings of male paid employees.

**Country codes:** Belgium (BE), Bulgaria (BG), Czech Republic (CZ), Denmark (DK), Germany (DE), Estonia (EE), Ireland (IE), Greece (EL), Spain (ES), France (FR), Croatia (HR), Italy (IT), Cyprus (CY), Latvia (LV), Lithuania (LT), Luxembourg (LU), Hungary (HU), Malta (MT), Netherlands (NL), Austria (AT), Poland (PL), Portugal (PT), Romania (RO), Slovenia (SI), Slovakia (SK), Finland (FI), Sweden (SE), United Kingdom (UK).

**Eurostat data sources:** Population, Total EU employment by gender, Employed women by education, Employed women by economic activities, Female unemployment, Youth unemployment, NEETS, Women in part time employment, Women with children, Gender pay gap and Women employed as scientists and engineers are from Eurostat.

**Notes:** GlobalStat is a project developed by the European University Institute's Global Governance Programme (Italy) and the Francisco Manuel dos Santos Foundation (Portugal).

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